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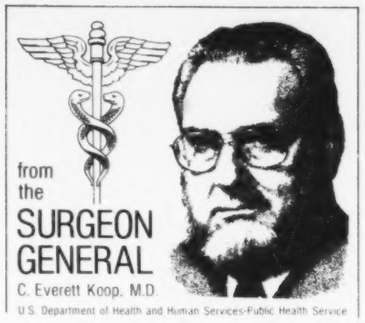

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Breast Feeding: Good for Your Baby and You

One of the many decisions new parents must make is how to feed their baby. If you decide to breastfeed, you'll be joining a growing number of parents who have made that same choice. More than half the babies born in the U.S. are now breastfed.

Nothing is as good for your baby as mother's milk. It has all the nutrients your baby needs for healthy growth; it comes complete with infection-fighting substances that help to protect the baby from illnesses. Mother's milk is always clean and at the right temperature, ready to serve when baby is hungry. Your newborn is less likely to have allergies if you breastfeed.

Should you decide not to breastfeed, for whatever reason, commercially prepared infant formulas are satisfactory alternatives. These formulas are made from cow's milk or soy protein and are similar in nutritional value to breast milk. They do not contain the protective properties of breast milk, however, nor are they as convenient or as beneficial for the mother.

Breastfeeding, to put the matter another way, is good for you, as well as your baby. The mother who breastfeeds has no formula to mix, no bottles to wash. Her milk is the only food her baby will need for the first five to six months of life. Breast feeding also helps her get her figure back faster, by using up the extra weight she put on when she was pregnant and by helping to shrink her uterus back to its normal size.

Breastfeeding usually costs less than formula feeding—you don't have to buy formula, bottles and other equipment. You will need to eat well, though—just as well as you did when you were pregnant and in somewhat greater quantities.

An extra reward from breastfeeding is that it brings you and your baby closer—now and in the years to come. Nursing helps you tell your baby of your love, long before he or she could understand your words of love.

Breastfeeding has been called the "natural way" to feed your baby, but no new mother automatically knows how to breastfeed. It's something that has to be learned. Your doctor and the staff at the hospital or clinic can give you a lot of help. If you know someone who recently has breast fed her own infant, she can give you pointers, too. Another good source of information is the La Leche League, an organization of women who have breastfed their babies and want to help other mothers do the same. Check your phone book to see if your town has a chapter. If not, write for free materials about nursing your baby to: La Leche League International, 9616 Minnesota Avenue, Franklin Park, Illinois 60131.

Obviously, you'll be better prepared to breastfeed if you make the decision to do so fairly early in your pregnancy. Be sure to tell your doctor. He or she will tell you some things you can do during the last months of pregnancy to help you get ready for this new and rewarding experience.

And it *is* a rewarding experience, one that more than half of all new mothers today are choosing. Why? Because breastfeeding is more that just good for your baby and good for you. It's the best possible way for the two of you to begin a long and loving relationship.

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